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SERMON

Preach'd before the
Lords Spiritual and Temporal
in Parliament assembled,

IN THE
ABBEY-CHURCH of Westminster,
on Wednesday, Jan. 19. 1704.

BEING THE
FAST DAY

Appointed for the Imploring of a Blessing from
 Almighty God upon her Majesty and her Al-
 lies engag'd in the present War: As also for
 the humbling our selves before him in a deep
 Sense of his heavy Displeasure, shew'd forth
 in the late *Dreadful Tempest, &c.*

TALBOT

By the Right Reverend Father in God WILLIAM Lord
 Bishop of Oxford.

L O N D O N,

Printed by W. S. for T. Bennet at the *Half-Moon* in
St. Paul's Church-Yard. MDCCIV.

Die Jovis, Jan. 20. 1704.

IT is Ordered by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House shall be, and are hereby given to the Lord Bishop of *Oxford* for his Sermon preach'd before this House in the Abbey-Church at *Westminster* yesterday; and he is hereby desired to Print and Publish the same: And that the Lord Keeper do signifie the same to his Lordship.

Matth. Johnson,
Cl^r Parliamentor

SERMON

Preach'd before the

House of PEERS, &c.

Isaiah, Cap. 58. V. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

3. *Behold in the day of your Fast, you find pleasure, and exalt all your Labours.*
4. *Behold ye fast for strife and debate: and to smite with the fist of wickedness: Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.*
5. *Is it such a Fast that I have chosen? a day for a Man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a Fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?*
6. *Is not this the Fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*
7. *Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to thy house; when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy self from thine own flesh?*

WE are this day met by the pious Command of our Sovereign, to Humble our selves before God in Fasting and Prayer: And the Words which I have read, may very properly be improv'd to serve in some measure the Ends for which

Authority has appointed this Days Fast, if we come hither with such Dispositions, as that dreadful Providence which gave occasion to it, ought in reason to have worked in us.

I shall not take up your time in describing that Amazing Tempest, or recounting the great Losses which the Publick, or private Persons have sustained by it: surely such a stroke of Providence, as we must look very far back into our History, if we would find any thing near coming up to it, which we felt so very lately, and which has left such Marks behind it, that we can hardly pass the Streets, or travel the Roads, but we see some remains of it; cannot be so soon forgotten, that you should already need to be put in mind of it.

Much less, shall I search into Natural Causes, or labour from thence to account for the Terrible Blast: No, *The Lord was in that Wind*; it was Appointed or Permitted by Him whom the Winds and Seas obey, and whose Word the Storms and Tempests fulfil, to awaken and chastise a secure and sinful People.

I shall only beg of you to remember, what Thoughts you then had, when your Hearts, if I may use our Saviour's Words in another Case, *were failing you for fear, and for looking for those things, which you then apprehended, were coming upon you.* They were such Thoughts, as I will venture to say, neither the most Graphical Description of the Astonishing Storm, nor Rhetorical Amplification of the Hurt done by it, can now raise in you.

Reflect what awful Apprehensions you then had of the Divine Majesty, what Regret you felt for your Dis-

Disobedience, what Vows you made of more faithful Service to him for the future ; how willingly you would then have purchased, even with the utter renunciation of all the Pomps and Vanities of the World, and all the sinful Lusts of the Flesh, such an Opportunity as you now enjoy, of seeking for Peace and Reconciliation from your Offended God.

Think over again those Thoughts and Resolutions, which your Minds were full of, when you every Moment expected your own Houses to have been made your Tombs, and your selves bury'd in the Ruines of them, and bring the same now into the House of God ; Be but as serious and earnest this day in your Petitions for his Mercy and Resolutions of Obedience, as you were then ; and we may through his Goodness hope, that this Fast will prove *such a Fast as he has chosen, This day an acceptable day unto the Lord.*

That I may contribute what I can to that Blessed end, I have chosen this Text, which is a Reply sent by God to a Complaint of the *Jews*, wherein they seem'd to implead his Justice, as if he had dealt hardly by them in not making such returns to their Fastings and Humiliations, as they believed those severe Services had deserved from him. God, in answer to their impious Expostulations, tells them, that their *Fasts*, as they performed them, were so far from meriting from him, that they were highly displeasing to him ; shews in what Instances they were faulty and defective ; appeals to them, whether they could believe those *Fasts to be such as he had chosen*, or as could be called *acceptable days unto the Lord* ; and then points out to them those several Duties, the practice whereof would recommend their Fasts to his

Acceptance, and make them such as he had chosen.

I shall beg your Patience while I treat of the Argument now before me in this Method.

1. I shall consider in general the Duty of Fasting, its Nature, Ends and Uses.

2. I shall reflect upon those Faults of the Jews recorded in my Text, which made their Fasts unacceptable to God.

3. I shall enquire whether we of this Nation are not too justly chargeable with the same Faults in ours; and whether we have not therefore too much reason to fear that God may expostulate about our Publick Fasts, as he did with them, *Are they such Fasts as I have chosen?*

4. Lastly, I shall lay before you, and press you to the practice of such things as may make this Day of Humiliation appointed by Authority, *an acceptable day unto the Lord.*

1. I am to speak of Fasting in general, which, as to the meaning of the Word, is only an Abstinence from Food: The Greek Word for it, signifies *not to eat*; and in the Hebrew Phrase, of afflicting of the Soul, we must understand the sensitive Part of Man; for that is it which feels the uneasiness of Fasting.

Whether this Abstinence should be Total, or Partial, from all sorts of Food, or only from such as are more Pleasant and Nutritive, and how long it should be continu'd, cannot be determined by any General Rule that can reach all Persons; but the

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Constitutions and strength of particular Persons must be considered, and such Abstinence used by them respectively, as will best answer in each the Ends and Uses of Fasting.

We are not to look upon fasting in it self as a thing that recommends us to God: for if we consider only the bare eating or not eating, Neither are we the better if we do not eat, nor the worse if we do: But they are the good ends for which fasting is appointed, and which are promoted by it, that make it acceptable to God: regard therefore must ever be had to those ends, and such measures taken as may be most conducive and serviceable to them, and they are chiefly these:

1. For the crucifying of the flesh and the lusts thereof, the subduing and mortifying the sinful Appetites of the Body, and extinguishing those impure flames which burn within: Now that Nutriment which constant, plentiful and especially which Luxurious eating does administer, is the fuel that feeds those flames, and makes them rage; but Fasting abstaining from such eating is the taking away that fuel, for want of which the Fire will weaken and by degrees go out.

2. For the better disposing the Mind to Prayer, and other spiritual Exercises: The corruptible Body (as the Wise Man says) is too apt, at all times, to press down the immortal Soul; the Load of Matter which we carry about us, too constant a Hindrance to the Mind in her Motions towards Heaven: But these Clogs are then most heavy upon the Soul, and she is most sensible of them, when the Vessels are fill'd and stretch'd with plentiful Eating and Drinking:

Then

Then the Head is clouded, the Thoughts are dissipated, the Operations of the Mind languid, and cannot exert themselves with any Vigour: Hence our Lord exhorting his Hearers (in 21 of St. *Luke*) to *watch and pray always*, (as a Preparatory thereto) bids them to *take heed that their hearts be not at any time overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness*, which would render them very unfit for those Duties; but Fasting (which is frequently, in the Bible, joyn'd with Prayer) is a great Help to it; it prevents, or disperses the Clouds which darken the Understanding; it lessens the Weight that lies upon, and presses down the Soul; it helps to collect and compose the Thoughts, and gives a Freedom and Activity to the Mind, that she can put her self forth with Quickness and Intention.

3. For the testifying our Shame, and Sorrow; our Anger at our selves for our Sins, whereby we have provoked God: Indeed, if we are not inwardly afflicted for them, no outward Pretences will do any good; but where those outward Expressions proceed from, and are Evidences of a Mind truly humbled and contrite, when we abstain from our daily Bread, as a Token that we judge our selves unworthy of it, when by denying our Bodies those grateful Refreshments which they call for, when by expressing a just Indignation at, and acting a sort of holy Revenge upon our selves, we declare and manifest before God, our deep Sense of our offending him, how much we are confounded and grieved for it; these Signs and Expressions will no more be despised by Him, than those *broken and contrite Hearts* from whence they proceed.

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These are the chief Ends of Fasting; which, when it is performed with due Regard to them, and not out of any hypocritical Design to get Applause from Men, or vain presumptuous Fancy of compounding with God, or making Him satisfaction for our Sins by it, whether we voluntarily impose the Duty upon our selves, or observe it in Obedience to the Commands of our Superiours, we may be assured from the Scriptures, 'twill not be displeasing to God.

We have God's express Command for it, to his People the Jews, in *Levit. 16. 29.* and *cap. 23. 27.* and *Numb. 29. 7.* The tenth Day of the seventh Month, is there appointed to be yearly observed by them as a Day of Fasting and Humiliation, which the Hebrews express by *afflicting the Soul*; and this was to be a Statute to them for ever; i. e. to be obligatory upon them as long as their OEconomy should last. Besides this yearly Fast, they were obliged to observe divers others in after times. The Prophet Joel frequently and earnestly presses them to this Duty; *cap. 1. 14. Sanctifie a Fast, and cry unto the Lord:* and *cap. 2. 12. Turn ye with weeping, and fasting, and mourning:* and *vers. 15, &c. sanctifie a fast, call a solemn Assembly,--- Assemble the Elders,--- Gather the children, and those that suck the breast, and let the Priests weep between the Porch and the Altar, and say, spare thy People, O Lord;* and then in the following Verses, are added many gracious Promises to encourage them to it. Holy Men of old practised it, as we find in the Instances of *Ezra, David, Daniel, &c.*

And that we may not think this to be such a Jewish Rite, as concerned only those that lived under their Dispensation, we read that when the Prophet *Jonah* denounced God's Judgment against the City of *Nineveh*, those Gentiles proclaimed a Fast, and observed

it universally from the greatest to the least, from their King to his meanest Subject; none of them feed or drank water, or tasted any thing, but were all covered with sackcloth, and cried mightily unto the Lord. And the Success was as remarkable as their Fast, for though God had passed Sentence upon them, and appointed the very day for their Destruction, and ordered *Jona* to publish it in these Words, *Yet forty days and Ninueeth shall be destroyed.* Yet after all this, notwithstanding this seemingly peremptory Denunciation against them, upon their observing the Fast appointed by their King, in so extraordinary a Manner, God reverses his Sentence, and repented him of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not. And to put this Matter out of all doubt, the blessed Author of our holy Religion in his Sermon upon the Mount, in *Mat. 6. 16, 18.* though he does not directly command Fasting, yet supposes it a Duty to be practised by Christians, gives directions for the right Performance of it, and upon such a performance, assures us of a Blessing from our Father which is in Heaven, *When ye fast, ye my Disciples, be not as the Hypocrites, --- But thou when thou fastest anoint thy head, and wash thy Face, that thou appear not unto Men to fast, and thy Father which seeth in Secret, shall reward thee openly.*

Indeed he does in that Chapter censure the hypocritical Practices of the Pharisees, who fasted to be seen and admired by Men, and tells them, that since the obtaining the Praise of Men was the great End they proposed in those Exercises, that was all the Reward they must expect for them. But from our Lord's reproving the Hypocrisie of the Pharisees Fasts, and declaring their Unacceptableness to God, can no more be concluded, that a true Fast answering the
Ends

before the House of Peers.

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Ends of Fasting, is not a Duty incumbent on Christians, or not pleasing to God, than that the Jews were not obliged to fast, or (when they performed that Duty in a due Manner) did not serve God acceptably, can be proved from those Faults, which, in my Text, God reprehends in their Fasts, and which I am, in the

Second Place, to consider.

1. The first was this, That though they used great outward Austerity, and severe Discipline towards the Body, there was no inward Change or Reformation of the Mind: *They afflicted their souls for a day, i. e. abstained a whole Day from gratifying their Senses; They hanged down their heads like bulrushes, and spread sackcloth and ashes under them; they put themselves into the Posture and Habit of sorrowful Penitents, but for all this God tells them, that in the day of their fast they found pleasure; they did not mortify their Lusts as well as their Bodies. They could for one Day abstain from their Food, but not from their Sins; or if they did for a Day forbear both, it was that they might return to both, the next, with the greater Appetite; and therefore God asks if they could call such a Fast, an acceptable Day unto Him? Alas! none are such, but those that are attended with a thorough Reformation; when the Mind is humbled, as well as the sensitive Part afflicted; the sinful Inclinations of the Soul denied, as well as the craving Appetites of the Body: But this was the least of their Care; whatever Hardships they put upon the Flesh, they would not quit their fleshly Lusts; they could part from a Meal or two, but not from their Vices; they could turn to God with Crying and Fast-*

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ing,

ing, but not with all their Hearts; an empty Stomach, or a squalid Habit they could offer to Him; but not a broken Heart; a Day they could spend in some external Severities, but would not dedicate their whole Lives to his Service: And this was the first Fault which made God reject their Fast with Indignation; it was all Out-side and Hypocrisie, no real Repentance, or Turn of the Soul towards Him.

2. The second was their Divisions and Contentions: *Ye fast* (says God) *for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of Wickedness.* Covetousness and Oppression, Selfishness and Revenge did too much reign among them; There was little (or none) of that publick Spirit, that Contempt of private Interest where the Publick was concerned; that Unanimity, that mutual Trust and Confidence, which are the Strength and Beauty of any Body Politick. They were broken into Parties, or rather every one was setting up for himself, and studied only how to gratifie his own Humor, his own Covetousness, or angry Passions; and they abused their very solemn Days of Fasting and Humiliation to these Ends, and seem'd to abstain from their Food, and the Works of their ordinary Callings, that their Heads might be more clear to contrive, and their Hands more at liberty to execute wicked Designs against one another: *Ye fast* (says the Lord) *for strife and debate, and to smite*— These seem the Ends of your Fasting, these the Purposes you intend to serve by it; and by this Means *you make your voice to be heard on high*; i. e. the Voice of your uncharitable Contentions, the Voice of the Oppressor, and the Voice of the Complainer; *These are heard on high*, they are come up to me, and have reached my Ears; they have quite drowned the Voice of your Prayers,

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hindered all good Effects of your Fast, and made it an unacceptable Day unto me.

13. The last fault reflected on, which spoiled their Fast, was their Want of Compassion and Charity to those that were in Affliction: This seems imply'd in the 7th. Verse, *Is not this the Fast that I have chosen, to deal thy bread to the hungry, that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy self from thy own flesh?* This was the Fast that God had chosen; but he tells them, theirs was not such as he had chosen, and undoubtedly they were faulty in this Respect. They did not sympathize with the hungry, the naked, and destitute; did not provide them Meat, and Cloathing, and Habitation; *They hid themselves from them,* would not hear their Complaints, regard their Misery, or minister to their Necessities, though *they were their own flesh.* Israelites as they were, descended from the same common Stock with them: Nay, though they were related to them by a more noble Alliance, Shareers with them in that glorious Prerogative of being the peculiar People of God, whom he had distinguished from the Nations round about them, by blessing them with the Light of his written Word, a holy Religion, a pure Worship; when their Neighbours, and the whole World besides, were involv'd in Ignorance, Idolatry, and Superstition: Though these their poor Brethren were favour'd so far by God, as to be admitted to partake with them of his spiritual things, they thought it a great matter that they should partake of their carnal things, and would not communicate thereof to them, how much soever they stood in need of them.

Thus Hypocrisie and Want of true Repentance towards God, Divisions, and Want of Unity among themselves; Hard heartedness, and Want of Bowels towards their suffering Brethren, spoild all their Devotion, rendred their Fasting ineffectual to any good Purpose, and made God have as little Regard to Them and their Services, as they had to God and their poor Brethren.

These Faults we find them frequently charged with, and severely threatned for in other Places of Scripture; and these undoubtedly were very instrumental in pulling down the several Judgments that beset them, and that miserable Destruction which at last utterly consumed them. Neither God's severer, nor his softer Methods could work Sincerity and real Reformation among them: *In their Afflictions they would pretend to seek God, and enquire early after Him; nevertheless (as David observes) they did but flatter Him with their mouths, and lied unto Him with their tongues.* Upon his saving and delivering them from the Hands of their Adversaries, for a Time they seem'd to believe his words, and would sing praises to Him; but, within a while, they forgot his Works, and would not abide his Counsels.

The incorrigible Hypocrisie of their Humiliations God afterwards reproved by the Prophet Zechariah in much the same Stile with that which he had before addressed to the Complainants in my Text. During their Captivity in *Babylon* they had yearly observed several Fasts; The Fast of their Fourth Month, in which their City was taken; the Fast of the Fifth, in which their Temple was burnt; the Fast of the Seventh, in which *Gedaliah* their Governour was treacherously slain, and the Fast of the Tenth, in which *Nebuchadnezzar* began to besiege *Jerusalem*. But they ha-

having obtain'd a Decree from Cyrus for the Rebuilding of their Temple; and that Decree having been confirmed, and the thing encouraged by Darius, and the Building having been carried prosperously on; they sent to enquire of the Lord, whether the Fast of the Fifth Month, which was occasion'd by burning of their former Temple, ought to be continu'd now, when their New one was in such a forwardness. To which God sent a Reply directed to all the People and the Priests, in these words, *When ye fasted in the Fifth, and in the Seventh Month, even in those seventy years, did ye fast at all unto me? One would have thought that a People in their Circumstances, under so long and miserable a Captivity, should have been very serious in their Fasts, and that the sense of their Afflictions should have made them in good earnest, when they were humbling themselves before God for those Sins which had provoked him to lay those heavy Judgments upon them: And yet, it seems, all their Devotions were but Pageantry and Shew: There was nothing of sincere Repentance or amendment of Life; wherefore God asks them, Whether they had fasted at all unto him?*

A like Thred of Hypocrisie there was that ran through their Fasts, and Prayers, and Alms, and all their Services in our Saviour's time. Their outward Pretences to great Sanctity, without any inward Purity, or real Concern for God or his Honour, gave occasion to those several Woes which our Lord denounced against their Scribes and Pharisees not long before their Final Excision.

And as from the beginning they had been given to Factions and Divisions, and often suffer'd for them; so towards the end of their Polity, they were blown up to such a mad height, that they were not only some

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of the Causes which provoked God, but proved the Methods which He made use of to accomplish their Ruine. Those miserable Factions which their Jealousies and Suspicions of one another, had broke them into, made them an easie Prey for the *Romans*; nay indeed, they themselves did the Work of the *Romans* for them, in the first place burning up their own vast Stores of Provisions, which should have enabled them to have held out a Siege, which they had resolv'd to undergo; and afterwards butchering one another in such a barbarous manner, that when their Besieger *Titus* saw the vast Numbers of dead Bodies that they threw over the Walls, to shew that he had no hand in that miserable Slaughter, lifting up his Hands to Heaven, cried out, *It was none of his doing.*

And that their want of Bowels for those in distress, their *Hiding themselves from their own Flesh*, their Insensibility of the Sufferings of their Brethren had not the least share in bringing God's Judgments upon them, may be gather'd from that Prophecy in the 6th of *Amos*, where God tells them, *They put the evil day from them*, they liv'd in Ease and Pleasure, indulged themselves in Luxury and Wantonness; but *they were not grieved for the Afflictions of Joseph*, they had no concern or pity for their Brethren of the Ten Tribes, that labour'd under the Tyrannical Oppression of their Enemies. Therefore, says he, for this reason, to make them feel it themselves, *they shall go captive with the first that go captive*, v. 7. And at the 8th, *The Lord swears by himself, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: Therefore will I deliver up the City, with all that is therein.* Here God threatens them that lived at their ease in *Sion*, v. 1. and had no Compassion for their suffering Brethren of the Ten Tribes, of whom a great Part were then gone into Captivity, that

that they should go next, that he would give them also up into the *Assyrians* Hands.

Now all these things hapned unto them for *Ensam-
ples*, and are written for our *admonition*; to the intent
that we should avoid their Sins, and repent as far as
we have been guilty of them.

3. Let us therefore in the third place enquire whe-
ther we of this Nation are not justly chargeable with
the same Sins which they committed, and so severely
smartered for; and whether we have not too much rea-
son to fear that God may expostulate with us about
our Publick Fasts, as he did with them, *Are they such
Fasts as I have chosen?*

We have had formerly Monthly Fasts, and many
others since, appointed by our Governours: But whe-
ther they have been observed *unto the Lord*, in such a
manner as he has been pleased with, we have too much
grounds to doubt, or rather too little to make any
doubt of it.

1. Let us enquire in the first place into the sincerity
of our Humiliations; Whether our outward Expressi-
ons were real Indications of Minds truly awakened and
broken with a deep sense of our Sins, and the Sins of
our Nation: Where there is such a Sense, it will be
attended with that Godly Sorrow which worketh Re-
pentance; a Sorrow that will evidence its sincerity
by a careful leaving of those Sins which we mourn
for: But if there be no forsaking, there is no true ha-
tred of them: If we resolve to go on in them, nay, if
we do not resolve against them, it is too plain we still
retain a love for them; and all the Trouble and Re-
gret we express'd, was but meer pretence and Hypo-
crite. The Rule which our Lord has laid down for

us to judge of Prophets by, is a very certain one for Penitents too, *By their fruits ye shall know them.* Those only are truly such, who bring forth the meet Fruits of Repentance : And what Fruits can we shew ?

If the most daring Affronts to God, even the questioning his Being and Providence ; if the denying or disputing the Divine Authority of his Revelations ; if audacious Enquiries into the manner of his Subsistence, and bold Oppositions to what he has revealed of it ; if divesting his Eternal Son, *God blessed for ever*, of his own Divine Nature, because he has for our sakes humbled himself to take our Humane Nature upon him ; if denying the satisfaction which by suffering in our Nature, he made to the Divine Justice for our Sins ; if exposing the whole Mytery of our Redemption ; if light or profane use of God's holy Word, even to Railery and Burlesque ; if irreverent use of his Sacred Name in common conversation, or rather impious Abuse of it by Swearing and Cursing, the too common Rhetorick of many Persons Discourses ; if the yet more daring Attempts to make God a Party to Injustice and Villainy, by calling him to be a Witness to Falshoods ; if a gross Neglect of, or a Formal, Customary, Irreverent Attendance upon his Ordinances ; if the prophaning his Sabbaths, and converting that small Pittance of our Time, which he has reserved for his own more solemn Worship, to secular and sinful Uses ; if a vilifying and despising of those Persons, that are appointed and set apart to his more immediate Service, and to minister about holy Things ;

If the more publick Oppressing of others by Force, or abused Law, or the privater Methods of cozening and Cheating, Trick and Circumvention in Dealing, the making Advantage of their Weakness and Necessities ;

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If the abusing our own Boddies by Incontinence and Intemperance, by *Chambering and Wantonness*, by *Rioting and Drunkenness*;

In short, If a general Dissolution of Manners, an avowed Defiance to all God's Laws, natural and reveal'd, whether they respect our Duty to God, to our Neighbours, or to our Selves; if these are the proper Fruits of Repentance, we have brought them forth so abundantly, that there is reason to fear that no Country or Age could ever shew more such Penitents than ours: But if these things are directly contrary to the true Ends of Fasting, and the very Reverse of what we professed and solemnly vow'd upon our Days of Humiliation; then are we as chargeable with Hypocrisie in our Fasts as the *Jews* were: Nay, to shew how far we have exceeded their Impieties, permit me to mention one Instance, though I cannot do it without Horror, of a late daring Affront to God, unparalell'd by the *Jewish* or any civilized Nation, which looks like a defying, if not a ridiculing of his Judgments; I mean, that impudent Representation of a mock Tempest on the Stage, so soon after we had felt that dreadful one, that gives occasion to our meeting this Day. I think I should not have been Just to my Subject, if I had omitted to take notice of this unpresidented piece of Profaneness; and certainly 'twill be no Digression from it, to add, That whilst these Nurseries of Lewdness are suffer'd to corrupt the Age, 'tis in vain to hope to see it reform'd: and while we *hate to be reform'd*, may not God with too great reason ask us, *Are your Fasts such as I have chosen?*

Let us enquire in the next place, whether we have any Advantage over the *Jews* in the second particular; Whether we are less divided than they?

more heartily united among our selves? more unanimous in carrying on the Publick Good? Alas! Has it not been the Policy of our Enemies, from the very Reformation, when they could not conquer us by outward Force, to endeavour to make us destroy our selves by intestine Divisions? And have we not too easily fallen in with these Designs of theirs? I shall not look farther back than the two Reigns preceding the Revolution: What Properties were we then made? divided into Factions and Parties by the Cunning and Artifices of the Jesuits? How were the several Parties play'd by turns against one another by the unseen Hand, and managed like meer Machines to pursue their Designs, and our own Ruine? Towards the End of the last of those two Reigns, our common Danger being more near and apparent, seem'd to have taught us a little more Wisdom as well as Charity, and made us more reconcileable to one another, and willing to provide for the common Safety:

And one would have hoped, that by the happy Accession of his late Majesty to the Throne, a Prince who had no Interest of his own, Politick or Religious, separate from that of the Kingdom, and who had a true Design to make up our Breaches, and unite us all in one common Interest, that great End might in some measure have been obtained; and we might have been made like *Jerusalem, as a City that is at Unity within it self*. But alas! our Charity and Prudence too soon blew over with our Fears; the accursed thing was still among us, and troubled our *Israel*: private Interest and private Revenge, which will slip no opportunity of being gratified, divided us at the very Beginning of his Reign, and put us upon such Contentions as were between the Men of *Israel* and

and the Men of *Judah* upon their bringing King *David* to *Jerusalem*, each pretending to, and striving for the greater interest in him. Their Contentions ran very high indeed, and produced an unnatural Defection and Rebellion of the Men of *Israel*, who thinking themselves not sufficiently regarded by *David*, though they were of the first that proposed the bringing him to *Jerusalem*, yet out of an unreasonable Resentment, were the first that revolted from him. Our Contentions were not carry'd so far; however this was one unhappy Effect of them, That the wisest Counsels, the prudent'st Designs for the Publick Good, often met with the violentest Oppositions, and fiercest Endeavours to defeat them, from some, who would have been hard put to it to have given a better Reason for their obstructing them, than because they had been laid, or were to be executed, by such as were of a different Party from themselves. No one can forget what Difficulties were started, and Rubs thrown in the way, to retard our Preparations, and enfeeble our Enterprises; and these things, no doubt, helped to prolong that War which we were then so uneasy under, as there is too much reason to believe, that that War abroad accidentally contributed to keep us the quieter at home; for no sooner was that over, and we at Peace with our Enemies, but we were more at leisure to fall out among our selves: and God knows there were too many ready to lay hold of the Opportunity; which they so fatally improved, that we became too like a Ship, which having, by the skill and Conduct of an excellent Pilot, weather'd the Storms abroad, out-liv'd the Dangers of the Seas, baffled the Pyrates, escap'd the Rocks and Sands, and come safe into Port, was, through the Contentions

and Madneſs of the Crew, in danger of being ſunk in the Harbour.

That Peace did not laſt long: God thought fit to correct our Factions at home by another War abroad. The Ambition of a Prince, whom no Treaties or Oaths can bind, made it neceſſary for our King to form new Alliances, and enter into a Confederacy with ſeveral Princes and States of *Europe* for the common Safety: and juſt when a War was unavoidably breaking out, and when by the unwearied Application and wiſe Management of his Maſteſty all things were ſo diſpoſed, that we had the moſt promiſing Proſpect of a happy iſſue of it, and that he might have obtained the great end which he had aimed at through the whole courſe of his Life, the eſta bliſhing the Peace and Quiet not only of thoſe Countries to which he had a more near Relation, but of all *Europe*, and the reducing the Power of the great Diſturber of them; Then was God pleaſed to take him away from us, at a time when his Life ſeem'd to be of the laſt conſequence to us, by reaſon of his great Courage and Conduct in War, and Inter-eſt with all the Confederates.

But even in this Judgment God remembred Mercy, and ſeated our preſent gracious Queen, whom God long preſerve, peaceably upon the Throne: A Queen! after his own Heart, and ours too, if we did but underſtand our true Inter-eſt, to the promoting of which She ſeems to have given her ſelf entirely up, deſpiſing the Softneſs and Pleaſures which might be thought more allowable in her Sex, and going cheerfully through ſuch Difficulties and Fatigues as might have ſtartled ſome of the other.

Upon her Maſteſty's putting on the Royal Crown, we talked much of burying all our Differences and Marks

Marks of Distinction; and uniting heartily in the common Interest; and indeed, no one in reason could have expected less: those Grounds of Dissatisfaction which some had pretended in the last Reign, being taken away in this; Her Majesty being *English* by Birth and Education, and bred up from her Infancy in the Church of *England*, having imbib'd the Principles of this Church with her Milk, and constantly lived a shining Ornament to her Communion; and besides, being allowed to be next and directly in Succession to the Crown by All, but those who set up the Interest of a pretended Prince abroad. But all these fair and promising Hopes were soon like to have been blasted by the scurrilous Discourses and scandalous Pamphlets with which some Incendiaries labour'd to blow up the Coals, to revive the old, and kindle fresh Flames among us. 'Twas not enough that there were Dissenters of several Denominations unhappily divided from the Church, but the Church must be divided against her self, by the distinction of High and Low Church-men: Such as have never separated from her, but lived in constant Communion with her, nay, some who have adorn'd her Communion by their exemplary Lives, edified her Members by their constant and successful *Labours in the Word and Doctrine*, defended her Constitution, her Doctrines, Discipline, and Worship, against all Opposers, in their unanswerable Discourses and Writings, been Confessors to her in times of Danger, and who, we cannot in Charity doubt it, would be ready, if call'd, to die Martyrs for her; have been traduced and stigmatized as Enemies and Betrayers of her. How sad Effects this wicked Practice has produced, is too melancholick a Reflection to dwell on.

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'Tis certain, that neither the wonderful Successes with which God blessed ours and our Confederates Forces, by Sea and Land, the last Year but one, were able to make Peace and Union among us; nor the slackening those Successes the Year immediately past, to abate our Heats and Animosities: and now God seems, as his last Effort, to have taken the matter more immediately into his own hands, and by a dreadful Storm from Heaven shattering our Houses, and destroying our Shipping, and so many of our Seamen, the living Bulwarks of this Kingdom, to try to allay those Storms of Contention which our Enemies have raised, and we keep up among our selves, even to the hazard of shipwracking the whole Nation.

Thus God himself seems to have been chastising our Factions, and trying to unite us by various Dispensations of his Providence, sometimes by shewing us our common Danger at home, by bringing near to us a threatening Ruine just ready to swallow us up, then, when that seem'd in some measure to have softned us, by raising up a Deliverer, to be his Instrument in rescuing us from the Jaws of Destruction, afterwards by exciting foreign Enemies to divert us from quarrelling and fighting among our selves; then, when we had lain some time under that Discipline, by trying us with a blessed Peace, and now again by a necessary War, by various Events of it; and at last by setting the Winds in array against us.

And what Effects do we at present find of all these Methods? Are we heartily united among our selves, or are we in a good disposition for it? Are all Marks of Distinction forgot? Are we resolv'd, laying aside all private Quarrels and Disputes, to act unanimously for the common Good?

Alas!

Alas! Are we not still miserably torn into Parties and Factions? Are not too many among us more zealous to promote the Designs of their Party, than the Interest of the Nation? More jealous of the opposite Party, than apprehensive of the common Enemy? More industrious to crush them, than to subdue him?

And while we are thus divided, thus full of *Strife and Debate*, may not God, with as much reason, expostulate with us as he did with the Jews? *Is it such a Fast as I have chosen?*

3. Lastly, The other Fault which rendred the Jews Fasts unacceptable to God, was their want of Compassion to those in Distress; *Their hiding themselves from their own flesh*: Indeed they understood *those of their own flesh* to be Jews only, of the same Nation with themselves; but, as God made all Men of one Flesh, and all are descended from the same common Parent, so that *Wall of Partition* which divided Jews from all others, and confined their Charity to those within their own Pale, being taken away by Christ, and there being now no distinction of Jew and Gentile, but *all being one in Christ Jesus*, we are now to look upon all Men as *our own flesh*, and not to hide ourselves from any that are in want or misery; though still, in case of competition, regard must be had especially to *those that are of the household of Faith*.

And how have we discharged this Duty? God be praised there are among us some *burning and shining Lights*, some bright Examples of a true primitive Charity; the Lord encrease the Number of them: But the very frequent Complaints both of old and impotent Persons, that by Age or Accident are disabled from Work, and of poor Children which we meet with every day in the Streets and at our Doors,

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and of such likewise as being by Sickness and Weakness confined at home, can do nothing to help or support themselves, and are forced to send abroad for Relief; do too plainly shew, that the Charity of many is waxed cold, and they do not as God has prosper'd them, in proportion to what he has blest them with, lay aside some of it for the Relief of Christ's poor Members, *their own flesh*. And no wonder, that there is little Charity where is so much Vanity and Excess in Furniture, Apparel, and Equipage, in Eating, Drinking, and all Instances of Luxury, as is to be seen, according to their respective Abilities, amongst almost all Ranks of Persons. 'Tis not strange that *those that lie upon beds of Ivory, and stretch themselves upon their Couches, and eat the Lambs out of the Flock, and the Calves out of the midst of the Stalls, that chaunt to the sound of the Viol, and invent so themselves Instruments of Musick, that drink Wine in Bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief Ointments, are not grieved for the Afflictions of Joseph*: Such soft and luxurious Persons have no sense of their poor Brethrens Wants, and consume that upon their own Lusts, with which they should relieve them.

I shall make no farther complaint in the general, but must beg leave to lament the Case of a particular sort of Sufferers, and the hard-heartedness of some towards them, who, though not of our own Nation, are nearly ally'd to us by spiritual relation, Members with us of Christ's mystical Body, and reform'd Members too. I mean those Protestant Confessors who were forced some Years since to quit their own Country, that they might keep their Religion, who yet have been treated by some, as if their being banished out of their own Nation for Christ's sake, made them unworthy to be received into any other.

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Some have deny'd them Relief, or afforded them very little, and given that grudgingly, and as it were of necessity; some have thought it too much that they are permitted to live here at all, that they are supported by others, or allowed to maintain themselves by their own Labour: But whither would they have them go? to their own Homes, or any Popish Country? There they must change their Religion, or die for it: and other Protestant Countries have their shares of them, and may at least as well object against them as we.

I cannot conclude this Head without reminding you of that dreadful Threat which God denounced by Amos against the incompassionate Jews, *that they should go captive with the first that go captive, and that he would deliver up the City with all that is therein.*

God grant that we may not, by too nearly imitating their Sins, provoke him to make us like them in their Punishments too. In order to avoiding whereof, I proceed,

4. To my fourth and last Head of Discourse: Under which I am to lay before you, and press you to the Practice of such things as may make this Day of Humiliation *an acceptable day unto the Lord.*

And what can do this, but our careful avoiding those Sins which the Jews are here reprov'd for, and practising their contrary Duties.

1. In the first place, we must be sure to avoid that foolish and provoking Sin of Hypocrisie. How senseless an Attempt is it, to Impose upon him that knows all things? to put an outside Devotion, and counterfeit Repentance upon him *that searcheth the heart, and tryeth the reins? Thou fool! did not he thus made that which is without, make that which is within also?* And of how great Guilt may't this Sin be?

The Hypocrite must believe, either that God does not see through his vain Pretences, does not discern the Falseness of his Heart; or if he does, that he has no regard to true Goodness and inward Piety: the former is plain Atheism, and the latter is to believe wickedly, *that God is such a one as himself*: but *let us not be deceived, God will not be mocked; he requires Truth in the inward parts*, and nothing but Honesty and Sincerity can recommend our poor Services to his Acceptance: we should therefore, upon such days as these, retire very seriously into our selves, *commune with our own hearts, call our ways to remembrance*, compare them with that Law which ought to have been the Rule of them, search out in what Instances they have deviated from it, what Judgments and Miseries, by erring from it, we have exposed our selves to, the temporal ones in this life, and the more dreadful eternal ones in that which is to come: And when a poor Sinner has thus convicted himself upon Tryal at the Bar of his own Conscience, and is awaken'd to a just sense of that tremendous Sentence which is ready to be executed upon him, it will be very strange if he be not truly humbled, and struck down at the apprehension of his miserable state: But when by searching farther into the Word of God, he shall find, that notwithstanding he has forfeited all Pretences to God's Favour, God is unwilling to take the Forfeiture, and still ready to be reconciled to him, and receive him upon terms into Mercy, that there is a way proposed for him to escape the eternal Punishment of his Sins, and be for ever happy, that *God is in Christ reconciling the World to himself*, and will not impute their Iniquities to them who truly repent of and forsake them; he must certainly, if he has any concern

cern for himself, apply himself earnestly to his compassionate God, through his powerful Mediator, and lay fast hold on the Anchor cast out to him, resolving sincerely to close with the gracious Terms offer'd, and to discharge, whatever it may cost him, as much as in him lies, the Conditions required: upon the performance whereof, his everlasting Welfare does so much depend. And this is the proper business of every one of us this Day, impartially to examine our Lives, bring them to the Test of God's Law, humble our selves for all our Transgressions against it, and resolve, and immediately enter upon a more careful Observation of it for the future: but in this we must be very real and hearty; for however we trifle with our selves, we cannot impose upon God, and nothing but Sincerity and Integrity will pass with him.

2. In the second place, we must have a care to avoid all Evil, Strife, and Division. How unfit shall we be to seek Reconciliation with God, while we are at enmity one with another? We must *follow after the things that make for Peace*, both Ecclesiastical and Civil.

The Consideration of Duty in this case is strongly supported by that of Interest: for how probably, almost necessarily, will a Kingdom torn by civil Dissensions, and a Church divided by Schisms, *be brought to Desolation?* especially when dangerous and powerful Enemies are watching for opportunities to enter in upon them at the Breaches their own Members have made?

As for us, What course can we take or think of to secure that happy Constitution which we, above all Nations, are blest with in Church and State, but by heartily uniting in the Interest of our present

Government and establish'd Religion? What can they change to, but either to the Oppressions and Confusions of a Popular Government, or rather Anarchy, and the various wild Schemes of Religion which shall be advanced by every Enthusiast; or to the insupportable Yoke of Popish Tyranny in Church and State, which *neither we nor our Fathers were able to bear?*

Let us then weigh things calmly, like Men govern'd by Reason, and not hurried on by Prejudice and Passion: Let us consider whether any Change that can be projected by the wisest Politician, must not necessarily engage us in more insuperable Difficulties, and load us with infinitely heavier Burdens than any that can be charged by its most implacable Enemies upon our Establishment as it now stands: Whether the breaking in upon the present Settlement, and the Succession to the Crown, as it is now limited, must not unavoidably involve us in Blood and Confusion, and end at last in the utter Ruin of our Liberties, and all that is dear to us. And that these may not look like wild and groundless Suggestions, let us think whether those that are making and fomenting Divisions among us, can have any other Design, than to introduce a Change in our Government; and whether those Convulsions which Divisions occasion in a Political Body, do not naturally tend to its Dissolution.

Let all of us that wish well to our establish'd Government, joyn Hearts and Hands for the Support of it: Let us be far from repining if at any time we, or those that we think fittest for them, are not employed in Posts of great Trust and Power; but let us cheerfully contribute what we can in our privater Spheres to its Preservation, and heartily

tily bejoyde in its Prosperity, whatever hands it may be administred by.

Let all that have the Happiness to be Members of our excellent Church, have that Charity for each other, as not presently to conclude those Betrayers of her Interest who go not with them into the same Methods of supporting it, but believe that they may have the same just Zeal with themselves for her Security and Prosperity, though they may differ from them in the means of procuring it.

Let such as are dissatisfied with the Terms of her Communion, consider, whether any or all of the several Schemes of Discipline and Government set up among our Dissenting Brethren, can be any Barrier against the Invasion of Popery; whether our Church has not shew'd her self to be the great Bulwark against it; whether they can satisfie themselves that there are Terms of Communion imposed by her, which the Word of God has made it a Sin to comply with; and, if they cannot convince her of Sin in this respect, whether little Scruples, which have no countenance from Scripture, and either are owing to the Prejudice of Education, or have been suggested to them by some whose Persons they have had in admiration, ought to come in competition with so known a Duty as that of Unity is; or can excuse a Sin of so deep a dye as Schism, which is so severely censured in the Sacred Writings, and those of the ancient Fathers, and which has, in our case, so dangerous a tendency to the Subversion of the whole Reform'd Religion.

If we would reason coolly about these things, we should all find it to be our true Interest, as well as bounden Duty, to joyn heartily together for the Support and Preservation of our present

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Establishment in Church and State: we should not hearken to the subtle Insinuations of our common Enemies, who are endeavouring to divide us, that they may find their Account in our Ruine, we should see through their Designs, and all their Artifices would have no other Effects upon us, than to make us know them the better, and put us upon the stricter Guard against them.

And were we thus heartily united in sincere Wishes and Endeavours for the Prosperity of our *Sion*, for the Continuance of those invaluable Blessings which God has so bountifully bestow'd and wonderfully preserv'd to us in our Civil and Religious Capacities, as our Union would be the greatest humane Defence against the Attempts of our Enemies, so our joynt Fasts, and Prayers, and Cries, would reach Heaven, and engage God on our sides, and then no matter who, or how many, are against us.

3. But in the last place, Let us take heed of Unmercifulness and Hard-heartedness to those that are in Want and Misery: for, with what face can we ask, with what reason can we expect from God; Supplies for our Wants, or Succour in our Distress, if we refuse such Help, as we can give, to our poor Brethren in their Affliction? But Alms give Wings to our Devotions, and mount them to Heaven: *Thy Prayers and thy Alms*, says the Angel to *Cornelius*, in the 10th of the *Acts*, *are come up for a Memorial before God*: Our Alms are the Incense that perfumes our Sacrifices, and makes them ascend with a sweet smelling Savour to God: Our charitable Distributions to the needy, God looks upon as Loans to himself, and has promised to repay them with

with use: Nay, our Saviour owns them as Gifts to him, *In as much as ye have done it to one of these my Brethren, ye have done it unto me.* Who would not then retrench from his Expences, at least his superfluous ones, to lay up something, that he might put out into such hands upon such Interest? nay, to give to him, who has deserved so highly from us, and will make us infinite Returns of Glory for it?

Providence has now presented, and Her Majesty has most piously recommended to us two kinds of Objects, both certainly very deserving of our Charity;

The first are, the poor Relicts of the Seamen, that were lost in the late Storm. None ever made a doubt whether Widows and Orphans were not proper Objects of Compassion and Mercy; but these Widows and Orphans have a juster Claim to ours, they having been made so by their Husbands and Fathers dying in our Service, which they as surely did, being destroy'd by the Tempest, as they could have done if they had been kill'd in an Engagement with the Enemy: and shall not good Nature, Gratitude, Justice, and Interest, prompt us to return their Services and Sufferings for us in liberal Contributions to their desolate Relations?

The other are, the Persecuted, Banished, Protestants of *Aurange*; who, to preserve Faith and a good Conscience, have left their Country, Estates, Relations and Friends, and thrown themselves upon the Providence of God, and Charity of such as profess an abhorrence of those *Romish* Abominations, their Non-compliance with which has occasion'd their Sufferings.

Surely,

Surely if Christ may be said to suffer in his Members, it is especially in those that are persecuted for the sake of him and his Religion: and whatever charitable Supports are deny'd to them, he will undoubtedly, at the last day, tell us were refused to him.

Let us reflect, however willing some are to forget it, that it is not very long since we had but too just Apprehensions that what is now theirs, would have been our own case, that we should have been forced to quit our Religion or our Country; and if we had been driven abroad, and put to great Streights upon the account of our Religion, what should we have thought of those Protestants that should have deny'd us Relief?

Let us not deceive our selves, if we can refuse our liberal Contributions according to our respective Abilities, to these our distressed Brethren, 'tis much to be fear'd, that had we been in their condition, we should hardly have suffer'd as they have done: for 'tis difficult to suppose that he should give his Body to be burn'd for his Religion, that will not spare some of his Goods to feed them that are persecuted for it: He would scarce abandon his Country, and quit his whole Estate for a Cause, for which he cannot find in his heart to part with a small portion of it: And if we can hide our selves from, shew no Regard, minister no Relief to these Resolute Confessors, 'tis a shrewd Argument, that we have no just value for our Religion, as well as no pity for these, who have with the utmost hazard asserted it. And if we are yet to learn both these, How just will it be with God to teach us the Worth of our Religion,
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by the want of it, and Compassion to such as suffer for it, by making us experience what they feel. And what an uncomfortable Reflection will that of Joseph's Brethren be then to us, *We are verily guilty concerning our Brethren, in that we saw the anguish of their souls, when they besought us and we would not hear : therefore is this Distress come upon us.*

Let us then contribute freely and cheerfully to them, remembring the Words of our Lord, *That it is more blessed to give than to receive* ; we cannot place out our Money to better account than in Acts of Charity ; nor in any Acts of Charity more advantageously than in such as these : By this we shall testify in some measure our grateful sense of God's Goodness in continuing to us the free Exercise of our Holy Religion in our own Countrey ; and this will be the best Method to prevail with God to preserve it still to us, next to a general Conformity to the whole Tenor of it.

By these means, by sincere and unfeigned Repentance towards God, by hearty Union and Concord among our selves, by a tender sympathizing with, and cheerful relieving of our poor Fellow-Members, those especially that suffer for *Righteousness sake*, we may hope to make this *Fast an Acceptable Day unto the Lord*, and through his Goodness obtain those Blessings, for the procuring whereof it was appointed.

He of his infinite Mercy grant, that we may
all in this our Day see and do the things
that belong to our present and eternal Peace,
through Jesus Christ, &c.

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to prevail with God to preserve it still to us,
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and what is to come.